



WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying or often called psychological violence in the workplace is a deliberate, repeated mistreatment of a targeted employee by one of more people in the workplace. A workplace bully can be a staff, subordinate, or even a supervisor. In fact, over 80% of the bullies are supervisors and equally likely to be a male or female. When a person (target) is being bullied in the workplace, this damages the targets physical and psychological health, and threatens their job security. Workplace bullying is just the opposite of the typical childhood bullying scenario, where an unpopular and weak child is picked on. *In workplace bullying, the victim is usually well educated and very competent in doing their job, which poses a threat upon the bully.* As a result, the bully seeks to rid of them. The intimidation and manipulation in workplace bullying are similar to those behaviors observed in Intimate Partner Violence. It is a problem where "boundaries" are crossed, and communication, productivity, and personal health suffers.

Over 80 per cent of bullies are bosses, some are co-workers and a minority bully higher-ups. A bully is equally likely to be a man or a woman.

Top Ten Bullying Behaviors

1. Insults & put-downs
2. Criticism of ability
3. Constant blame for "errors"
4. Unreasonable job demands
5. Threat of loss of job
6. Exclusion of target-not being included
7. Inconsistent compliance with rules
8. Taking credit for the targets good work or ideas
9. Yelling/screaming-usually behind closed doors
10. Spreading rumors

Four Types of Bullies in the Workplace

1. The Constant Critic: The Constant Critic Bully is extremely negative, a nitpicker, perfectionist, whiner, complainer, fault finder, a liar. They are loved by senior management because of their ability to "get people to produce." This type of bully destroys the employee or target of their self-confidence and encourages self-doubt. They do this by:

- Putting the person down, insulting, making belittling comments, name-calling
- Constant haranguing about Target's "incompetence"
- Makes aggressive eye contact, glaring at Target; demands eye contact when she speaks but deliberately avoids eye contact when Target speaks
- Negatively reacts to contribution of target [sighs, frowns, peering over top of eyeglasses to condescend, sour face (the "just sucked a lemon" look)]
- Accuses Target of wrongdoing, blamed for errors made up by bully (doctored documents, compromised databases, fake witness accounts)
- makes unreasonable demands for work with impossible deadlines, applies disproportionate pressure, expects perfectionism
- Sends signals of disrespect through hyper-confident body language--sitting at desk with feet up, showing target bottom of shoes and talking to target through feet, bully grooms self (hair, nails) while ignoring the Target; making target sit while bully stands, hovering over, staying above them
- Over-use of memos, e-mails, messages to bury Target in correspondence

Continued...

-
- Requiring replies personally criticizes aspects of the Target's life that are irrelevant to work-- appearance, family, friends
 - Excessively or harshly criticizes Target's work or abilities
 - Engages Target in intense cross-examination to belittle and confuse

2. Two-Headed Snake: Has a Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde passive-aggressive behavior that is a dishonest style of dealing with people and issues. They often pretend to be nice while sabotaging you. "Friendliness" serves only to give them information that they can later use against you. They often play favorites with staff in the organization.

- Demands that co-workers provide damning "evidence" against Target, uses lies or half-truths, threatens non-cooperators (the "divide and conquer" technique)
- Discriminates against smokers by requiring they gather trash from the parking lot while taking a smoke break
- Assigns meaningless or "dirty" tasks as punishment
- Makes nasty, rude, hostile remarks directly to Target while putting on a rational "face" for others
- Breaches confidentiality; shares private information about the Target with co-workers or other bosses
- Discriminates against non-smoking Target by permitting breaks only for smokers
- Creates a special personnel file kept in bully's car or locked in her office full of defamatory information to sabotage Target's career inside or outside the organization
- Steals credit for work done by the Target

3. The Gatekeeper: The most transparent of all controllers. The bully needs to establish themselves as "one up" on you, to order you around or to control your circumstances. To the bully, control of all resources (time, supplies, praise, approval, money, staffing, help) is the most important aspect of work. Approval must be solicited from bully at all times.

- Ignores the Target; giving the "silent treatment," and modeling isolating the Target
- Sets office clocks 15 minutes ahead of "real" time, then punishes Target for being "late" at start of day, while not allowing her to leave before quitting time according to "real" time
- Deliberately cuts the Target out of the communication loop--stops mail, e-mail, memo distribution, doesn't return calls
- Refuses to make "reasonable accommodation" for Target returning to work with a disability
- Refuses to follow internal policies and government-mandated employee protections for Target
- Denies privileges and rights to Targets who file complaints against the bully, either an internal complaint or a lawsuit or with the EEOC, DOL
- Makes up new rules on a whim, Target expected to follow, but bully is exempt

4. The Screamer: The stereotypical bully who controls through fear & intimidation. They are often emotionally out of control, impulsive, and explosive where the threat of physical violence can become an issue. This bully is overbearing, self-centered, and insensitive to needs of others. They are also overly concerned about being detected as an imposter and masks their incompetence.

- Yells, screams, curses
 - Barks out loud often that "I AM YOUR BOSS" "FOLLOW MY COMMANDS"
 - Poisons workplace with angry outbursts, tantrums
 - Intimidates through gestures: finger pointing, slams things down, throws objects
-

- Crowds the Target's personal space, moves close to threaten or to make the Target anxious, hovers over, sneaks up from behind to startle
- Constantly interrupts the Target during meetings and conversations
- Discounts and denies Target's thoughts or feelings
- Threats of job loss or change
- Traps Target by insisting that complaints go "up the chain of command," starting with her

(The above material was excerpted from *The Bully At Work*, © 2000 with permission by Gary and Ruth Namie, Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute)

The Impact on Your Health

Being bullied at work, can result in physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms. Physical symptoms may include aching joints, muscles, backaches, with no apparent or specific cause; excessive, tiredness, listlessness, exhaustion, fatigue; headaches, migraine, especially on specific work days; anxiety, palpitations, breathlessness;

- Loss of appetite, indigestion, disturbed eating patterns
- Disturbed sleeping patterns, inability to sleep or get to sleep, nightmares, constant flashbacks or replays
- Waking up more tired than when you went to bed
- Frequent, incessant, never-ending coughs, colds, flu and other minor infections
- Conjunctivitis, tired and sore eyes
- Excessive or compulsive picking, scratching, biting nails, grinding teeth
- Loss of sex drive and libido
- Dulled senses, especially touch, taste and smell
- Anaesthesia, numbness, pins and needles in hands and feet
- Poor circulation, cold extremities, such as fingers and toes
- Abnormal thirst
- Intolerance of certain foods such as sweets
- Unsettled stomach
- Unusual allergies
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Thyroid malfunction
- Asthma
- Anaemia
- Flatulence
- Unusual hormonal changes
- Intense dislike of cold
- Vertigo
- Sinusitis
- Angina, heart attack

DeCarli, J (2012)



Los Angeles County, Department of Public Health, Injury & Violence Prevention Program
 3530 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 800, Los Angeles, CA 90010
 (213) 351-7888 [www.ph.lacounty.gov/ivpp]

